

*The International Seminar on Regional Politics, Administration and Development 2020
(INSORPAD2020), STISIPOL Raja Haji, Riau, INDONESIA, 14-15 October 2020*

RP003

Civil Society Organizations and the Promotion of Democracy in the Nigeria's Fourth Republic

Surajo Yahaya Muhammad

*Department of Social Sciences and Administration, School of Continuing Education,
Bayero University, Kano, Nigeria. PMB 3011*

Corresponding author e-mail: mjsuraj09@gmail.com

Phone: +2348067041918

Abstract

To promote good governance and sustainable development, democracy and its tenants must to be in place, promoted and sustained. In Nigeria, there has been different regime after the return of civilian government in the fourth republic. Democracy appeared to find its place in Nigeria, but absence of political will, rule of law and inability of the government at various level to regard civil society organizations as important partner in the promotion of democracy has retarded the country's ability to attain good governance, effective and efficient services to its citizens. Being an important pillar in the democratic process of modern society, and in order to effectively enhance their roles in the promotion of the democratic process, the paper attempted to look at possible ways in which civil society organizations can organize and mobilize themselves to effectively work with the government in promoting democracy and thereby, ensures sustainable development in Nigeria. The paper relied on document analysis as a source of relevant secondary data, and thematic analysis in analysing the data through themes and sub-themes in accordance with the central ideas of the paper. The discussion was situated within the framework of structural-functionalism theory. The findings of the paper reveals that civil society organizations, being actor in Nigeria's democratic campaign process particularly in the area of anti-corruption, rule of law, respect for fundamental human rights has greatly helped the promoting democracy in Nigeria. The finding also reveals that civil society organizations are partner for development in any modern society through mobilization and voter education. The paper recommends the urgent need for civil society groups to understand that the need for unity by forming a multi-stakeholder mass movement in order to contribute towards democratic promotion particularly in the area of promoting democracy. It also recommends the need for a decentralized structure across the country.

Keywords: Civil Society, Democracy, Democratization, Good Governance and Rule of Law

1. INTRODUCTION

In any democracy, nascent or advanced, civil society organizations play a vital role in the promotion of democracy and the socioeconomic well-being of the people at large. Apart from their direct interference between the government and the governed which they are highly reputed, they also play an important role in policy formulation and execution through the watch dog, they also exist to represent and protect the interest of the citizens at large, thus the civil society organizations becomes an indispensable tool for sponsoring and sustaining democratization process.

The crux of a true democracy are good governance, fair and legitimate elections, justice, equity, accountability, transparency, rule of law, responsible leadership, political

education of the masses, efficient political institutions and respect for the rule of law. This means that a democratic environment creates an atmosphere where the majority of the citizens can massively participate in the decision making process which either directly or indirectly affect their lives.

Therefore, this paper will seek to find out some of the roles and efforts made by civil society organizations towards promoting democratic process in Nigeria, to identify the challenges facing civil society organizations in the process of promoting democracy in Nigeria and also to suggest ways alternatively, how civil society organizations could strengthen democratic process in Nigeria.

Secondary source of data were used in the collection of data for this paper through content analysis where relevant literature were reviewed such as, Books, journals, Magazines, newspapers, National Assembly statistical Information and hand book etc and the discussion was situated within the framework of.

1.1 Conceptual Clarifications

- **Civil Society Organisation:**

Social science concepts are not simple and unambiguous one because scholars have, using their spectacles, viewed them from different perspectives. The concept of civil society also suffers from the same trend. It is seen as a collection of institutions and other non-state groups who articulate the interests of not only their members but the society in general, moulding and constraining state power. Such groups most times determine the accountability of government by approving or disapproving what goes in to it. According to Diamond (1997) cited in Habu (2019:101) civil society concerns itself with public rather than private ends, relates with the state but does not seek to get position within the state, its partial and distinct from civic community. In the same vein, it is seen as;

...an opposite of despotism, a space in which several groups could exist and move something to ensure softer and more tolerable condition of existence (John hall as cited in Kukah 1999:43). This means that civil society organizations constitute a social force in a society who complements the state and also where necessary query state policies for the betterment of all.

In other words, civil society is seen as an array of varied civil associations working in different areas of interests and are tied and united by common values and goals working to improve the life of humanity. Moreover, another perspective is that of 'policy prescription perspective' which its proponents argued that civil society in Africa only emerged out of the 'good governance discourse' of the 1980s and 1990s spearheaded by western donor institutions such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF). The discourse, as Wendy (2008: 4) observed, saw Washington consensus which emerged in the 1990s prescribed a reduction in the role of state and increased role of civil society in the development process. Thus, civil society emerged primarily as a product of policy prescription to improve the performance of states in Africa. Though, scholars of African studies such as Mamdani (1996: 13), kicked against it on the basis of the fact that it assumed that Africa did not have civil society.

- **Democracy and Democratization**

The term, democratization, attracted attention in political science literature in the 1990's when the democracy movement was sweeping across the world. This movement brought about changes in the governmental systems in countries in Eastern Europe, the former

Soviet Union, and Africa, where before the movement these countries were characterized with one-party, military and communist rule.

The issue of democratization has been the most topical in recent times as regards to Nigeria's political development. Democratization simply connotes the process of installing a democratic system of administration. This, of course, involves an enhancement of the social condition necessary for the facilitation of a democratization process, characterized by a robust political atmosphere which ultimately engenders socio-economic and socio-cultural development of society. A democratic system of government is that political system in which everybody has equal opportunity to participate in the political process in whatever capacity that is deemed fit. A government, in this regard, derives its authority from the people who, in essence, choose those in various political institutions. An important feature of this system is the supremacy of the national or common interest, which must supersede personal interest (Ibagere & Omoera, 2010).

They contend that the democratization process has three phases: the fall of the authoritarian regime, consolidation, and enduring democracy. Obviously, the foregoing opinion and similar others do not specify a time frame for the actualization of the three highlighted phases. It, therefore, means that the peculiarities in each system would play a profound role in the process of actualization. In the case of Nigeria, the slow pace of the process raises doubt in the minds of many people who, for instance, are confounded as to why such basic aspects of democracy as elections and legislative duties still lack significant purposiveness, fifteen years after the Fourth Republic commenced.

Basically, democratization connotes a process of movement from authoritarianism to a stable democracy. Democratization is the process of establishing, strengthening, or extending the principles, mechanism, and institutions that define a democratic regime (Osaghae, 1999). In his elaboration on this definition, Osaghae opines that two points could be inferred. One, that democratization is relative, incremental and phased. Two, that democratization is variegated in nature, calling for caution not to analyze it as a blanket process. It was Osaghae (2006), who equates democratization with transition to democracy; he explains it as a political process because it basically has to do with the transformation of the state and the political society. Golden (2010) conceptualizes democracy to incorporate the exploitative and alliterative tendencies often demonstrated by the capitalists against the downtrodden.

Yahaya (2007) sees democracy as both a procedural and institutional aspect of liberalizing a previously authoritarian political environment. It would consist of opening up a previously closed authoritarian political system and deepening and expanding of values, thoughts to be necessary for the entrenchment and sustenance of democracy. In essence, it is about the construction of a system that allows for the bulk of the populace to participate in the decision making process that has direct bearings upon their lives.

- **Good Governance**

The concept of good governance is central to democracy because the success of democracy is measured in terms of good governance. According to Habu (2019:100) governance is the art of governing by public officers entrusted with public trust and power for maximum utilization in social service provision and maintenance of public accountability, transparency, responsible and responsive leadership. Governance is said to be good when the rights of the citizens are protected, security is adequately provided, basic freedoms are guaranteed, and welfare of people is maximally satisfied.

- **Rule of Law**

A central element of the rule of law in a democracy is equality before the law. Democracy without the rule of law is quite literally unthinkable. Being subjected to the rule of law may sometimes be a vexation but it is the only sure and certain protection we have against tyranny, demagogues, and mob rule. The rule of law is the principle that the law should rule in the sense that it establishes a framework to which all conduct and behaviour conform, applying equally to all the members of society, be they private citizens or government officials. It means that no individual, whether president or private citizen, stands above the law. The rule of law is thus a core democratic principle, embodying ideas like constitutionalism, which is the practice of the rule of law and limited government. The rule of law protects fundamental political, social, and economic rights and defends the citizen from the threats of tyranny and lawlessness. Democratic governments exercise authority by way of the law and are themselves subject to the law constraints.

Citizens living in democracies are willing to obey the laws of their society because they are submitting to their own rules and regulations. Justice is best achieved when the laws are established by the very people who must obey them. This again emphasises the necessity for people participation in their own governance (including the making of laws) through consultative processes in decision-making. Whether rich or poor, ethnic majority or religious minority, political ally of the state or peaceful opponent all must obey the laws. The citizens of a democracy submit to the law because they recognise that, however indirectly, they are submitting to themselves as makers of the law. When laws are established by the people who then have to obey them, both law and democracy are served. It is for this reason that leaders should ensure that when writing new constitutions for their countries, the citizens must be widely consulted for their views and the debate prior to the promulgation of the constitution should be as open and transparent as possible.

2. THEORETICAL FRAME WORK

This paper, adopts structural-functionalism theory. Nwaso & Ofoegbu (1986) states that functions as expounded by researchers in politics refers to the contribution of part (civil society) or pattern of behavior to the maintenance and promotion of a given society (Democracy). According to Olaniyi (1999) structural and functionalism when related to politics can be discussed as a means of explaining basic functions of political structure, and it is a tool of investigation. The theory tries to explain the relationship between the parts (structures) on the one hand and between parts and the whole on the other. This relationships is explained in line with the basic function of each, which are considered positive contributions that help maintain and promote the system, or the dysfunction which refers to the negative contributions that led to the breakdown of the system, or nonfunctional when it bears neither positive nor negative impacts to the operation of the entire political system.

Therefore, this theory, structural functionalism is adopted in this paper to analyze the effectiveness of civil society in Nigerian as a structure toward promoting democratic process, structural functionalism theory assumes that in any political system, there sets of functional requirements and operational conditions that must be satisfied if the structure is to be effectively right. The sub-system (civil society) must brief up with certain individual and group needs which are fundamental, such vibrant civil society would accelerate democratization process. Therefore, the civil society is considered as the eye of the masses and or the electorates and it is indispensable in all democratic society.

The theory also assumes that, the role of civil society in understanding democratic process and conditions under which they can perform their roles in the democratic settings. This theory is relevant to the paper when viewing the Nigerian political system as whole and how dysfunctional of one part may affect the other and vice versa.

3. CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS AND THE PROMOTION OF DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

The right to participate in politics is an essential element of democratic governance because it provides the people the voluntary activities through which they can share in the selection of leaders and directly or indirectly in the formation of public policy (McClosky, 1972). From this standpoint, it becomes imperative that in the process of democratization, there should be genuine efforts to allow the people the right to participate in politics. The interplay of power and forces in Nigeria's effort to democratize raises some further questions about popular political participation. They include: Are Nigerian elections, which are supposed to be the process of choosing leaders, free and fair? how does the laws make by the assembly impacted on the lives of Nigeria's? How does assembly strengthen democratization process?, How are people organized in the different political parties or is nature of party politics conducive for democratization?, Are the supposed elected leaders accountable to be the people?, Is political power, which ordinarily belongs to the people, institutionalized or personalized?, These disturbing questions leave much to be desired about democracy in Nigeria. After the hurried transitional election that took place in 1999, Nigerians have had a number of general elections in the process of democratization. Although elsewhere we have observed that there are methodological problems associated with democratic process. It is against this background that civil society organization had participated severally in promoting democracy through monitoring of elections since the return of democracy in 1999 under the umbrella of Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) comprising many civil society organization groups.

According to Habu (2019:103) the election of 2007 was programmed to fail and it represented a serious democratic deficit to Nigerian's democratic development. Habu (2019) further stress that the position of CSO on the verdict of the 2007 election as full with irregularities. This loud calls by CSO made the president during inauguration speech on May 29, 2007 to concurred with the view of the CSO and other independent stakeholders that the elections was flawed and promised to reform the country's electoral system by setting up a 22 member Electoral Reform Committee to examine the electoral process with a view to raising the quality and standard of elections. Chief Justice of Nigerian than, Justice Muhammad Uwais, chaired the committee and its members were reputable statesmen and women with proven track record in public service, labour unionist, civil society group and pro-democracy activists and scholar activist of high repute. Also with the call of CSO, president Musa Yar'adua declared his assets shortly before his assumption of office, an action that attracted commendation across political divides and a broad spectrum of the Nigerian society and abroad (Habu,2019:103). This clearly shows how civil society organization acted vigorously in promoting democracy in Nigeria.

Civil society organizations has severally called the attention of the government towards balancing educational institutions across the states of Nigeria, this call prompted president Jonathan between 2011-2015 to established a number of Universities and

federal poly-techniques in Nigeria which includes, federal universities of Otuoke, university of Uyo, University of Dutsinma, University of Kashere, University of Lafia, University of Lokoja, University of Ndufu- Alike, University of Oye Ekiti, University of Dutse and lastly University of Wukari in Taraba state. In this regard, the civil society in Nigeria has contributed in deepening democracy by making a clarion call for the said establishment of federal universities across the nation, as a result of which the scope of admission has increased to a certain level, given many Nigerians the opportunity to enrol in to the university.

The fact that democratic process that takes place over a period of time and that in the process of democratization, the state, CSO and the general populace are the major actors who must show commitment to the whole process of trying to allow democracy to take a strong hold of the entire society. While countries that are transitioning are challenged to be committed, it is necessary to say that attaining democratization is possible, as western democracies have ably demonstrated.

Civil society organizations have been in existence even before the advent of colonialism to Nigeria, and have, in their own respective ways, been complimenting the leadership of Nigeria's pre-colonial societies to the extent that the boundary between them and the state is difficult to define. While affirming the above assertion, Habu (2010: 14) argued that, such groups took the form of corporative associations, secret societies, age grades, and the (*Yan gayyas*) self-help groups, and their existence has a long history and is a clear evidence to the fact that associational life sprung and shaped the direction of social groups in both social and productive economic activities long before colonization. This means that it is this kind of groups that laid the foundation for the emergence of contemporary civil society as we call them today. Because corruption was at its infancy during this period, such groups were assertive and non-confrontational.

With the subsequent forceful and illegitimate capture of Nigerian state by the colonial masters coupled with the abolishment of 'slave trade' with 'legitimate trade', and imposition of repressive and exploitative political and economic policies, a more radical and confrontation civil associations were forced to emerge against the colonial state. Such groups include among others; the Cocoa Producers Association (CPA), Nigerian Farmers Union (NFU), Nigerian Railway Union (NRU), National Union of Teachers (NUT), Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUCN). In order to suppress the groups in their quest to end colonialism, the colonial government in pursuance of the Public Order Ordinance limit the right to assembly by stipulating that, any meeting that exceed five people, must have Police permit. As a result, Ukase and Bem (2015: 176) asserts that, several people were killed by the Police during the Aba Women's protest of 1929. The riots led by women in the provinces of Calabar and Owerri in south-eastern Nigeria in November and December of 1929, against the policies imposed by British colonial administrators, such protest became a historic example of feminist anti-colonial protest. Despite the various attempts by the colonial government to restrain the radical anti-colonial spirits of the civil groups, Muntaqa (2011: 12) observed further that, many of them continue to emerge up to the extent of forging a united front under the auspices of Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUCN) in 1942 which later embark on a general strike against the corrupt and ill-conceived policies of the Nigerian colonial state. It was this radical spirit and ability to come together by the civil society groups that serve as a prelude to Nigeria's independence of 1960.

Moreover, at independence in 1960, the colonizers were replaced by what Jega (1993: 99) called a band of political and economic wrecking crews who cared little about democracy and democratic values... rather merely motivated by their selfish interests of

acquiring wealth than laying solid foundation for the emergence and sustenance of popular democracy in the country. According to Jega (1993), they even threatened the survival of the nation as one sovereign entity in their determined struggles to acquire more power and wealth, or protect what they have already acquired. It is only the struggle of some concerned Nigerians through working class unions and professional associations that forced ruling class to concede some democratic reforms even though state power was used to advanced selfish ends and execute unpopular and undemocratic decisions.

With the return of democracy in May 1999, the atmosphere was greeted with high hope and expectations to the extent that the euphoria can only be compared with the country's independence of October, 1960. The civil society organizations in particular, having struggled to get the prolonged military rule out of the country, saw the return of civilian administration as an opportunity to entrench democracy as well as instil a sense of responsiveness and accountability in Nigeria's governance by promoting democracy.

To sum it all, the foregoing discussion civil society organizations promote democratic process in modern societies. This could be seen in various circumstances and situations where the organizations acted vigorously in mobilizing and educating citizens to choose for the right candidate during elections. This is obvious in the case of Nigeria with the return of civilian administration and elections of 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019.

Challenges and Problems faced by Civil Society in Promoting Democracy

Civil society groups being an autonomous sphere of influence in the society, they are faced with the following challenges and problems as observed by Igbuzor (2010), Odey (2012), and Yusuf (2014) respectively, as stated below:

Lack of creative ways of information dissemination by civil society groups made it very difficult for people at the grassroots to easily comprehend the large volume of information in circulation especially on social media on alleged corruption related offences. This has created gap in public knowledge to the extent that a significant number of people are finding it difficult to interpret the available information at their disposal.

Funding has been a major challenge in civil society activism in general, and because most of the CSOs don't have independent sources to generate funds internally within them, they are left with no option than to buy in to the funding programs of international donor agencies which thus dislocate them from their original agenda of challenging politicians in the event of violating democratic principles.

Civil society organizations require knowledge, technical skills and method of evidence generation for democratic advocacy. Unfortunately, majority lack the skills to efficiently and effectively engage policy makers and political office holders to practically display genuine political will and commitment to promote democratic values. Hence, the reason behind the uncoordinated and reactionary campaign approach of most civil society groups in Nigeria.

Lack of internal democracy and workable accountability and transparency mechanisms in most individual CSOs, networks and coalitions has only succeeded in tarnishing their image, and has generally led to gradual erosion of confidence which the larger civil society have on them. Some CSO executives are so despotic in the way they manage their respective organizations to the extent that, some are only democratic when one looked at the design of their organograms. And because of the way and manner CSOs are expending donor's funds without concrete results to show, the moral base for CSOs in the campaign for the promotion of democracy is being defeated.

Civil society groups are also faced with the challenge of disconnecting themselves with the people that matter most, the grassroots people. Hence, the question on how representatives are CSOs with the constituencies they claim to be representing? The answer is for one to recognize the disconnection that exist and query the over concentration of such groups in the urban areas or cities.

4. CONCLUSION

The paper established that, if there is one pressing issue of concern Nigerian state under the present democratic dispensation should be an ideal democracy that respect fundamental principles of human and ensure good governance, which is part of the aim of the activities of the civil society, the paper argued that civil society organizations, being actor in Nigeria's democratic campaign process coupled with the fact that it's a development partner in its own right, need to urgently provide leadership to ensure synergy of efforts among stakeholders in the promotion of democracy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is the need for civil society groups and labour unions to understand that, unless we forged a united front by forming a multi-stakeholder mass movement in the process democratic promotion otherwise good governance will remain a dream. Such mass-movement will not only be restricted to the elite NGOs and labour unions but also other individuals, students, market women and community based organizations at the grassroots should be involve.

There should a decentralized structure across all the states of the federation. This means that, in each state, civil society groups should create a platform that will mobilize and carry along all associations and individuals passionate about promotion of democracy.

Civil society groups should have an independent source of funding to generate funds internally within them, this will help them to fund any programs they initiate without external influence.

For civil society groups to have credibility and ensure sustainability of the mass based platforms in the anti-corruption crusade across the states, internal democracy and a high sense of responsiveness, transparency and accountability must be seen in the management of the fronts and in relations with the state and the wider civil society.

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The International Seminar on Regional Politics, Administration and Development 2020 (INSORPAD2020), STISIPOL Raja Haji, Riau, INDONESIA, 14-15 October 2020

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